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U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park

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## Grand Canyon News Release

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Date: February 15, 2007

### **National Park Service announces availability of the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan Environmental Assessment for Grand Canyon National Park**

**Grand Canyon, Ariz.** – Grand Canyon National Park Superintendent Steve Martin today announced the availability of the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan Environmental Assessment/Assessment of Effect (EA).

The EA was developed in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (Kaibab Forest) to address the most pressing traffic, parking and visitor access issues in Grand Canyon Village.

Lack of adequate parking, limited access to the park's visitor center at Canyon View Information Plaza (CVIP), congestion in and around Mather Point (a popular overlook adjacent to CVIP), safety issues and resource damage that result from vehicle congestion and inadequate parking have all contributed to a poor visitor experience in the last few decades.

To address these issues, the EA provides management and implementation direction for proposed improvements to the South Rim's transportation system through the year 2020. The document evaluates four alternatives - alternative A is the no-action alternative; alternative B is the preferred alternative and is outlined in more detail below; alternative C emphasizes providing visitor parking near Tusayan south of the park; and alternative D emphasizes providing visitor parking at Canyon View Information Plaza.

All action alternatives would incorporate adaptive management approaches to meet objectives of the plan and would be implemented in phases over time. The National Park Service would initially implement physical improvements (e.g., parking lots) that address the highest need while at the same time investing in operational strategies (such as improved shuttle bus operations, new directional signs and improved website information). Improvements would be closely monitored by the National Park Service to confirm achievement of project objectives before taking any additional actions. Elements common to all action alternatives include:

- new visitor tour bus parking;
  - enhancement of the park shuttle bus system;
  - modifications to the South Entrance Station;
  - improvements to Grand Canyon Railway loading and unloading operations;
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- improved shuttle bus and tour bus access to Yaki Point;
- new parking and visitor facilities at CVIP, and improved trails, signage and shuttle bus access at Mather Point;
- expanded strategies for managing the transportation system to aid visitors with trip planning, to facilitate traffic flow and to improve directional and informational signage.

The action alternatives differ primarily in their approach to where development would occur (inside or outside the park) and how visitors would arrive (either by private vehicle or shuttle). The action alternatives all provide for an increase in visitor parking to meet projected demand, while maximizing the use of existing parking lots in Grand Canyon Village. None of the action alternatives would preclude other future transportation systems from being implemented, including those that may be required in the future for substantial increases in visitation.

Alternative B would achieve all of the project objectives while also ensuring a high level of resource protection. This alternative emphasizes collaboration with adjacent communities, businesses, partners, and other agencies to address South Rim transportation needs and would include key elements such as:

- vehicle access to the park's visitor center at CVIP;
- 600-900 visitor parking spaces at CVIP, as well as 40 commercial tour bus parking spaces and parking for RVs at CVIP and a tour bus drop-off area near the rim;
- up to 400 visitor parking spaces near Tusayan;
- re-routing the South Entrance Road south of CVIP and removing vehicles at Mather Point to enhance the visitor's experience and improve visitor safety;
- enhancement of the park's shuttle bus transit system;
- six entrance lanes at the South Entrance Station.

Initial phasing of alternative B would likely include up to 600 parking spaces and facility improvements (food/snacks, theater, bike rental) at CVIP; a pilot shuttle bus program to Tusayan to test need, feasibility and desire by the visiting public and local business community; and improved management of Grand Canyon Railway passenger loading and unloading at the historic Grand Canyon Depot.

"We are excited about the potential changes to improve visitors' experience and safety through this plan. Visitors, community members and local businesses have long been under-served because of parking and traffic problems at Grand Canyon," stated Superintendent Martin. "Our visitors travel from all over the world to visit this natural wonder - we need to provide the greatest level of protection to park resources and the best experience to those who come to see and learn about one of our nation's greatest assets."

Martin added, "Public input is invaluable in this process. We encourage the public to review and provide comments on this plan that will direct how we manage transportation into the future."

This planning effort was initiated in March 2006 with a public scoping letter and public meetings, with additional requests for comments on preliminary alternatives in August 2006. Responses to this scoping effort were used during the preparation of the EA. The National Park

Service and U.S. Forest Service encourage your review and comment on the EA. The EA will be on public review for 30 days, with comments accepted through March 19, 2008. The document is available electronically on the web, and can be downloaded from the park's website at <http://www.nps.gov/grca/trans.htm> or reviewed online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca>. Comments can be submitted online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca> (the preferred method) or mailed to Steve Martin, Superintendent, Grand Canyon National Park, Attention: Office of Planning and Compliance, P.O. Box 129, Grand Canyon, AZ 86023.

Two public meetings, in an open house format, will be held in conjunction with the release of the EA, one in Tusayan, AZ, the other in Flagstaff, AZ. The public is encouraged to come at any time during the meetings to visit information stations, speak with National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service representatives, pick up written information and provide comments in an informal setting. Meetings are scheduled as follows:

March 12, 2008	5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	Grand Canyon Squire Inn – Best Western Anasazi Room Highway 64 Tusayan, AZ 86023 928-638-4071
March 13, 2008	5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	Coconino National Forest Supervisors Office Conference Room 1824 S. Thompson Flagstaff, AZ 86001 928-527-3600

For additional information, please contact Vicky Stinson, Project Manager, Grand Canyon National Park at 928-774-3026.

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